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Reply to Marek Palaczyk,
"Neue Überlegungen zur absoluten Datierung der Funde
aus dem Schiffswrack von Mahdia"

It is flattering to see so much of what one has written recycled at such length. Marek Palaczyk covers much the same ground that I did in my discussion of the pottery in *Das Wrack*, concluding, as I did, that the bulk of it cannot provide a very close date. He has focused on five objects that he believes can be dated, if not more closely, at least later than some of the other material: the two Dressel 1/Will 4 amphoras (Rotroff, figs. 16 and 17); the Campana ware plate (Rotroff, fig. 1); the Titan amphora (Rotroff, fig. 15); and the small red-ware cup or bowl (Rotroff, fig. 7). I cannot endorse his dating of the Dressel amphoras and the Campana plate, and there is not enough evidence to date the Titan amphora and the red-ware fragment as closely as he argues.

There are two basic principles at stake here. The first is that the more examples of a class exist, and the larger the number of contexts in which they are found, the greater the possibility of close dating. Only three of the five objects that Palaczyk uses to support a later dating belong to this privileged class of artifact: the Dressel 1/Will 4 amphoras and the Campana ware plate. The second principle is that only comparison between objects of like fabric is valid in close archaeological dating. The red-ware cup belongs to an unidentified class and hence cannot be compared to objects within its own fabric group.

Dressel 1/Will 4 amphoras (Rotroff, figs. 16, 17)

Because of its fragmentary state, Palaczyk expresses doubts about the identification of Rotroff, fig. 16 as a member of subtype B and objects to its use as an important criterion for date. Both Elizabeth Will and Bernard Liou are inclined to identify the fragment as type 1B¹, and their authority should perhaps carry some weight, but Palaczyk

¹ Liou's opinion is reported in: G. HELLENKEMPER SALIES, *Der antike Schiffswrack von Mahdia: Bericht zur*

is right to point out that the identification cannot be 100% certain. He does accept, however, that the piece should be placed in the period of transition from 1A to 1B, which, from the point of view of chronology, comes to the same thing. The date of this transition has been debated. Palaczyk writes that most scholars quote a date between 75 and 50, while a few place the beginning of the process earlier. But scholarship, unlike democracy, does not properly rest on majority opinion, and there is conclusive evidence that the later form was being produced earlier than ca. 75: to wit, a Dressel 1B amphora from a Sullan destruction debris in Athens.

Since this is such an important context, it is worth providing some details. The amphora (Agora inv. no. SS 6814)² was found in a cistern that had been filled with debris from the sack, which took place on the first day of March in the year 86 BC³. There are about 125 inventoried pieces of pottery from an intermingled use and dump fill in the lowest 0.85 m. of the cistern, including 22 amphoras and stamped amphora handles. These include seventeen Knidian stamps of the *duoviri* period (110-88 BC), four of them dating within the last few years of that period, in the terms of the eponyms Hermon and Andromenes⁴. In the earth just above these fills was found a coin datable to the year of the Sullan sack (87/6 BC)⁵. It is these objects that encouraged Agora archaeologists to associate the deposit with the historical event. Although this is a secondary deposit, thrown into the cistern some time after the catastrophe in which the material was broken, no object from the cistern can be demonstrated to date later than 86 BC. This context, then, constitutes strong evidence that the transition from Dressel 1A to 1B had already begun by 86; ca. 90 would be a conservative approximation for the beginning of the process⁶. How long the transition lasted is anyone's guess – maybe twenty or thirty years? In any event, the inevitable conclusion is that the Dressel amphoras on the Mahdia ship require a date no earlier than ca. 90 BC for the sinking of the ship. One may go on to reason that the amphora on shipboard was *probably* not one of the first of its kind, and that a date later within the transitional period is indicated. That, however, is only *probable*; a date of "after ca. 90" is *necessary*.

Table Ronde vom 4. bis 7. Juni 1992. Bonner Jahrb. 192, 1992, 530. Will, in a letter of 9/25/93 writes that she identifies fig. 16 as Will 4b on the basis of its more massive dimensions in comparison to fig. 17; "I would say the Mahdia fragment [fig. 16] is an early example of 4b and that the complete jar [fig. 17] is probably a late example of 4a". I reiterate here my gratitude to Mrs. Will for her assistance.

² The amphora is described and illustrated in E. L. WILL, Les amphores de Sestius. Rev. Arch. Est et Centre-Est 7, 1956, 238–239, fig. 83, right.

³ PLUT. Sull. 14 gives the day.

⁴ For the *duoviri* period and its chronology see V. R. GRACE, The Middle Stoa Dated by Amphora Stamps. Hesperia 54, 1985, 31–35.

⁵ Cf. J. N. SVORONOS, Les monnaies d'Athènes (1923–1926) pl. 81,45–48; J. H. KROLL, The Greek Coins. The Athenian Agora XXVI (1993) variety 97. For the date see *ibid.* 69–71; 74.

⁶ Antoinette Hesnard, whose work Palaczyk cites, mentions a Dressel 1B amphora with a consular date of 97, which would push the beginning of the transition even earlier (A. HESNARD, Les amphores. In: A. DUVAL *et alii* [edd.], Gaule interne et Gaule méditerranéenne aux IIe et Ier siècles avant J.-C.: confrontations chronologiques [1990] 51).

The Campana plate (Rotroff, fig. 1)

I compared the black glaze plate to two vessels illustrated by Jean-Paul Morel in his compendium of the forms of Campana ware: 2257b1 and 2257c1⁷. (I am grateful to Palaczyk for pointing out a typographical error in my text: 2258c should be corrected to 2257c [not 2258a2 as he conjectures].) Palaczyk suggests that plates of Morel's series 2286 and 2287 provide closer parallels. However, an important defining mark of *Espèce* 2280, to which these series belong, is an angular profile ("anguleuse ou quasi anguleuse")⁸. The plate from the Mahdia ship does *not* have an angular profile, which must place it in *Espèce* 2250 ("sans carène ni quasi-carène")⁹. Two of the parallels Palaczyk suggests (2286e1 and 2287a1) seem to me inappropriate. Morel's 2286e1 has a proportionately much smaller foot than the Mahdia plate. His 2287a1 is a much larger vessel; since size affects the proportions of a vessel, it is unwise to rely on comparisons between vessels of widely differing dimensions. Palaczyk's third comparandum, 2286c1, is more apt, except for the angle of the wall. Interestingly enough, both this specimen and 2257b1 come from the same context, the Spargi wreck. That wreck is notable for the mixture of Dressel 1A and 1B amphoras in its cargo and must have gone down during the transitional period discussed above¹⁰. This is sufficient to demonstrate that plates closely similar to the Mahdia plate were being manufactured during the transitional period, probably ca. 90-70/60. Such plates may also be found in later contexts, but a plate of this shape, like the Dressel amphoras, does not *require* a date later than ca. 90.

The red-ware cup or bowl (Rotroff, fig. 7)

Neither the shape nor the ware of the red-ware vessel can be established. It could be a plate, a bowl, or a cup. Whatever the ware, it is certainly *not* Eastern Sigillata A, as Palaczyk imagines, nor did I identify it as such in my discussion. ESA is characterized by a fairly hard, creamy or pinkish fabric and a thick, firm, smooth, matte glaze, red to dark red in color¹¹. The Mahdia piece, in contrast, is made of a softer, more orange fabric, and bears a dull, fugitive glaze completely unlike that of ESA. Nor is it Pergamene Sigillata (a different ware, quite distinct from ESA), which is also characterized by a hard, dark red glaze¹². The Mahdia fragment is, instead, of an unidentified ware,

⁷ J.-P. MOREL, *Céramique campanienne: les formes*. Bibl. Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 244 (1981) 155, pl. 41.

⁸ *Ibid.* 160.

⁹ *Ibid.* 152.

¹⁰ On the basis of the amphoras, Elizabeth Will dates the wreck around 75 (E. L. WILL, *Amphoras and Trade in Roman Sardinia*. In: M.-S. BALMUTH [ed.], *Studies in Sardinian Archaeology 2. Sardinia in the Mediterranean* [1986] 215-216), a date which Palaczyk shifts downward in rather cavalier fashion to 75-50. Many authorities, however, continue to place the Spargi wreck around 100 BC or even earlier. For a recent discussion see A. TCHERNIA, *Contre les épaves*. In: DUVAL *et alii* (note 6) 297-299.

¹¹ For fabric descriptions, with Munsell readings, see V. R. ANDERSON-STOJANOVIĆ, *Stobi. The Hellenistic and Roman Pottery*. *Stobi: Results of the Joint American-Yugoslav Archaeological Investigations, 1970-1981*, I (1992) 44.

¹² For a description of this fabric see C. MEYER-SCHLICHTMANN, *Die Pergamenische Sigillata aus der Stadtgrabung von Pergamon: Mitte 2. Jh. v. Chr.-Mitte 2. Jh. n. Chr.* *Pergamenische Forsch.* 6 (1988) 13-17. Palaczyk erroneously equates ESA with Pergamene Sigillata. Possibly the confusion stems from the fact

which is as likely to be western as it is to be eastern. Although like forms may be manufactured in different wares, it is dangerous to use the form sequence of one ware for the close dating of another ware. Our ignorance of the ware, the incompleteness of the vessel, and the lack of any close parallel leave us on very thin ice when proposing a date for the red-ware fragment from the Mahdia wreck. None of the parallels I was able to find are very close, and Palaczyk does not have anything better to offer. While I think it possible, even likely, that the vessel may date close to the middle of the 1st century, it is simply not good archaeology to date the context on the basis of this little-understood fragment.

The Titan Amphora (Rotroff, fig. 15)

This amphora is one of a small number of jars representing the earliest phase of Dressel form 12. Closely similar amphoras are known from only one other site, the Titan wreck, which itself cannot be dated with certainty. Palaczyk places undue faith in a date within the decade 50–40 BC. Indeed, the source he cites gives an even narrower span: ca. 50–45¹³. This misleading precision perhaps stems from the suggestion that the ship was carrying supplies for Caesar's army during the siege of Marseilles (51–49 BC) when she sank¹⁴. This date, so conveniently and comfortingly exact, has been repeated time and again in the literature, but no amount of unexamined repetition can transform it from conjecture into proven fact. Like other 1st-century ships, the Titan wreck can be dated only by the objects she carried, and all such dates are relative, approximate, and uncertain, as André Tchernia has recently reminded us in his wonderfully titled essay "Contre les épaves"¹⁵.

The evidence for the date of the Titan wreck consists of two coins, two lamps, and a collection of Campana pottery¹⁶. The coins conform to monetary reforms of 89 BC and were minted before the time of Augustus, but a more precise date is not forthcoming. The lamps belong to Type 3 of Dressel's classification, examples of which, according to a recent survey, have been found in contexts ranging from 100–80/70 BC to the early 1st century after Christ¹⁷. Fernand Benoit placed the Campana ware around the middle of the 1st century¹⁸, and it is this estimate that spawned the hypothetical connection with Caesar in Gaul. But the noted authority Nino Lamboglia dated the Campana ceramics to 80/70, a date that Morel has shifted only slightly later, to 75/65¹⁹.

that in earlier publications, what is now called Eastern Sigillata A was routinely called "Pergamene Ware". Although the two share some forms, they are quite distinct in fabric, in chronological range, in geographical distribution, and in point of origin.

¹³ A. J. PARKER, *Ancient Shipwrecks of the Mediterranean and the Roman Provinces*. BAR Internat. Ser. 580 (1992) 424–425, no. 1149.

¹⁴ P. TAILLIEZ, *Travaux de l'été 1958 sur l'épave du Titan à l'île du Levant (Toulon)*. In: *Atti II Congr. internaz. di arch. sottomarina, Albenga 1958* (1961) 197.

¹⁵ TCHERNIA (note 10) 291–301.

¹⁶ F. BENOIT, *Nouvelles épaves de Provence*. *Gallia* 16, 1958, 5–9, figs. 2–5.

¹⁷ C. PAVOLINI, *Les lampes romaines en Gaule aux IIe et Ier siècles av. Jésus-Christ*. In: *DUVAL et alii* (note 6) 109–110.

¹⁸ BENOIT (note 16) 8.

¹⁹ N. LAMBOGLIA, *Cronologia relativa dei relitti romani nel mediterraneo occidentale*. In: *Atti III Congr. internaz. di arch. sottomarina, Barcelona 1961* (1971) 381; MOREL (note 7) 64, with note 258.

Lamboglia noted similarities to the Campana ware from the Spargi wreck, and a thoroughgoing comparison of the two groups, taking a possible downdating of the Spargi wreck into consideration, might allow the Titan material to move later. Until such study is undertaken, however, the Campana ware remains a weak prop for a lower chronology. Taken together, these objects suggest only that the ship probably sank no earlier than ca. 80/65, and the Titan wreck remains one more floating piece in the chronology of the 1st century.

The Mahdia jar is not precisely parallel to any single published amphora from the Titan wreck. We do not know whether the differences have any chronological significance, but they might, and the Mahdia amphora need not be precisely contemporary with the Titan jars. If the Titan ship sank at the earlier limit of the possible range, and if the variations are chronologically meaningful, the Mahdia jar could easily date within the first quarter of the 1st century. More datable contexts for this type of jar will be necessary before it can serve as an indicator for close chronology.

The pottery cannot provide a date for the sinking of the Mahdia ship; it can only tell us a date *after which* that event took place. Its heterogeneity suggests that the pottery was not new when the ship went down. It had been picked up here and there in the course of the ship's perhaps quite long life, and Palaczyk is certainly correct in saying that some or all of the amphoras were enjoying a second use as water jars. It would be pure chance (though not impossible) that a sailor bought a new replacement for a broken plate or cup just before boarding the ship for the fateful voyage, or that the captain chose that moment to splurge on an unbroached amphora of wine or dried fish. At least some of the cargo, however, is likely to have come straight from the manufacturer. A gap between the date of the ceramics and other items recovered from the ship would therefore not be surprising.

In my comments in *Das Wrack* I confined myself narrowly to the dating of the pottery. Other factors must be considered, however, in the search for the date of the sinking of the ship. Some of the newly-manufactured items in the cargo point to a city with a fully functioning marble industry. If that city was Athens, the ship must either have sailed before 86, when the Sullan sack delivered a crushing blow to Athenian craftsmanship, or considerably after that date, when the city had had sufficient chance to recover. Other evidence, such as the stagnating lamp and ceramic industry of post-Sullan Athens, suggests that recovery was slow. If the red-ware fragment and the Titan amphora do indeed hint at a date later than 86, the ship's last voyage is likely to have taken place at least a decade after the Sullan sack, if not more.